

# etc.

magazine

## Appalachian tale

A 2,000-mile hike across 14 states

The undocumented  
American dream

Surviving unhealthy  
relationships

Highway  
of tears

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## Letter from the editors

"Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter," Martin Luther King Jr. once said.

More than 40 years later, Etc. Magazine is dedicating this issue to those who are still struggling to make our world a better place. Here's what you'll find inside:

\* In "The Undocumented American Dream," Ashwin Sodhi introduces us to Erica, a young Mexican immigrant whose battle for citizenship hits close to home as she attempts to enroll at City College, and worries about being deported.

\* For those who have survived abuse and face the challenge of speaking out, peer education programs like Project SURVIVE provide the educational tools that help them confront their fears. Almon Smith's piece focuses on "Domestic Survival."

\* Feeling inadequate in the intimacy department? In "Surrogate Sex," Sunny Owen talks to a therapist who shares her hands on approach.

\* Rebecca Brassfield's "Angels on the Highway" reveals how precious and tentative life can be, and poignantly relates the tragic story of three City College students.

\* In "An Appalachian Tale," Cat Wiest describes her 2,175-mile journey as a lone female hiker who triumphs over her own self-doubt.

\* As the global warming issue heats up, City College's Biodiesel Conversion Club has responded by converting a 1974 El Camino into lean, green racing machine. Boyd Williamson takes a look under the hood in "Bio Camino."

\* Andrew Tan brings issues of multiculturalism to the forefront in "Comic Stereotypes," a story about Gene Yang's "American Born Chinese," an acclaimed graphic novel that explores the complexities of racial identity in America.

\* Stephanie Rice's story about "Job Hunting" examines the legal and ethical issues surrounding personality-testing.

\* In "Making the Homeless Count," T.J. Johnston reports about the City's effort to catalog street people.

\* Dance can also be an effective way to raise social awareness. Cindy Ngai's profile shows how CCSF's Kirstin Williams dances around the issues.

Putting together this issue of Etc. has emboldened us to go out, to make change, to better ourselves and our world. Our hope is that after you're done reading, you will go and speak out about what matters to you.

— The Editors

**Cover photo:** An Appalachian Trail hiker watches the sunset over a lake in Maine's 100-Mile Wilderness. Photo by Cat Wiest.

**Back cover photo:** A mural provides a window to the Mission's Hispanic heritage. Photo by Dante Mendoza.

**Opposite page photos (clockwise from top left):**

34) Cartoon character from "American Born Chinese"; 8) An Appalachian Tale photo by Cat Wiest; 26) Project Survive photo by Chris Boyd; 29) Bio Camino photo by Stefan Jora; 18) The American Dream Art photo by Chris Boyd







Written, edited, designed and produced by the journalism students of City College of San Francisco

#### Editor

GINGER MURRAY  
spiderdance@sbcglobal.net

#### Managing Editor

CYNTHIA FOSTER  
cynthia.foster@gmail.com

#### Assistant Managing Editor

EMILY FOSTER-HANSEN  
emilyhanson3@yahoo.com

#### Photo Editor

CHRIS BOYD  
christophergboyd@gmail.com

#### Production Editor

DANTE MENDOZA  
dmendoza37@yahoo.com

#### Web Designer

CLESI BARRENO  
greyangel2w@yahoo.com

#### Advertising Director

ANGELA WONG  
ahwong@hotmail.com

#### Copy Editors

CYNTHIA FOSTER  
EMILY FOSTER-HANSEN  
TJ. JOHNSTON

#### Writers

MANIKA ARORA  
REBECCA BRASSFIELD  
ERWIN CALUYA  
CYNTHIA FOSTER  
EMILY FOSTER-HANSEN  
TJ. JOHNSTON  
GINGER MURRAY

SUNNY OWEN  
STEPHANIE RICE  
ALMON SMITH  
ASHWIN SODHI  
ANDREW TAN  
CAI WHEAT  
BOYD WILLIAMSON

#### Photographers

CHRIS BOYD  
ERWIN CALUYA  
CECILIE MEDINA  
STEFAN JORA  
JENNIFER PICKENS

#### Magazine Adviser

TOM GRAHAM  
tg.journalist@comcast.net

#### Jour. Dept. Chair

JEAN GONZALES  
accionjg@aol.com  
(415) 239-3446

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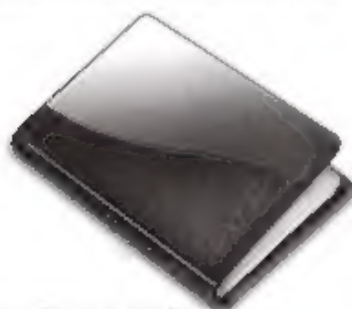
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# Letters to the Editor

## An Exclamation With a Point!!!

Dear Editor: I just had to take time out and compliment you and your magazine, Etc.

The first time I picked up one of these — I was pleasantly surprised to see that it was the work of CCSF students!!! I swelled with such pride (you would have thought I created it!!!), I had to show it to everyone!!!

This is of excellent caliber!!! Keep up the good work!!!

Fawn  
viagnefo@ccsf.edu

## Liberal Compliments

Dear Editor: I want to congratulate all of the staff of Etc. magazine on a

truly fine issue for the fall 2006 semester. Every aspect of this issue stood out to me — the writing, the photography, the graphics, and the editing.

I was consistently engaged as I read through all of the articles, and the graphics led me from one article to the next.

Finally, as with any good periodical, Etc. magazine is filled with articles that are relevant to its target audience.

Just like the magazines on my living room table reflect my interests, Etc. compelled me to read it because it contained things that I care about. Congratulations on your excellent work.

Bruce Smith  
Dean

School of Liberal Arts  
City College of San Francisco

## Etc. Online

The award-winning stories and photographs of Etc. magazine's Spring and Fall 2006 issues are now available online.

Please visit us at <http://www.theguardian.com/etcmain.html> and let us know what you think. See you online!

## Letters welcome

We invite readers to send letters to the editor. Submissions may be edited for length and clarity. Please write or e-mail Etc. Magazine, attention letters to the editor: [etc\\_letters@yahoo.com](mailto:etc_letters@yahoo.com).

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Award-Winning Issue

Dan Eldridge / ETC

# SURROGATE *Sex*



PHOTOS BY CHRIS ROYCE

## *Lending a hand can be therapeutic*

By Sunny Owen

**D**ating is hell! I don't want to do it anymore," says Rick, a 54-year-old environmental consultant.

Sitting in a steamy San Francisco apartment reverberating with squawks from his Cockatiel, Rick ruminates about his relationships with women.

"They have only the nicest things to say to me when they're showing me out the door," he says, explaining how years of dating humiliation kind of messed up his head.

What do you do when, for reasons physical or emotional, you've spent most of your life avoiding intimate relationships? How does the "40-year-old virgin" overcome his fear of women?

How about the woman who's been married for years before she finally accepts that she's gay?

Where does the sexual abuse survivor go to practice touch in an emotionally and physically safe environment?

"Well," says Isadora Alman, board certified sexologist, licensed California psychotherapist and popular sex-advice columnist, "when someone comes in and says, 'I don't

know this' or 'I haven't done that. How do I learn?' I tell them there are several ways! You can read a book, but books are not all that helpful – I mean, you can't learn how to swim unless you get wet. You can watch a video. Or you can work with a surrogate partner."

\*\*\*

Linda Poelzl practices surrogate partner therapy in San Francisco.

Trained to work with men and women under the supervision of a licensed therapist, she conducts clients through a series of exercises and activities designed to help them build physical and emotional intimacy skills.

There is warmth in her voice as she tells the story of the man she considers her greatest success. Let's call him Sam.

Sam was in his late 40s when he started seeing Poelzl. Depressed, and in therapy for years, he had never dated due to a rare genetic disorder that forestalled normal development in puberty. The condition was treatable, but his parents didn't act soon enough. By 20, his voice still



'Your girth is good. Your balls are a little smaller, but, you know, not to where a woman would scream, "Where are your balls!" in a horrified voice.'

— Linda Poelzl

hadn't changed.

Years later Sam looks and sounds like any other adult male. Testosterone shots and patches allow him to function sexually. However, Sam was extremely anxious about the size of his genitals, and the fact that he needed to apply a testosterone patch to his shaved scrotum.

"It took us a lot of sessions—more than usual—to take our clothes off, even for him to just look me in the eye," Poelzl says. "There was so much shame—he felt he was unlovable. He felt no woman would want him because his penis was too small."

Working closely with his therapist for many weeks, at last Sam was ready to undress. Finally seeing Sam's erection, Poelzl tells him that he is not abnormally small—he's really quite normal in the size department.

"Your girth is good. Your balls are a little smaller, but, you know, not to where a woman would scream, 'Where are your balls!' in a horrified voice. I don't even think you would really need to tell anyone right away, or even at all," Poelzl tells him.

"He was very surprised. I mean I was telling him the truth, because I was expecting to see something really small, but it was about four inches, or a little over, which is within the normal range. So. We went on from there, and he kind of blossomed after that."

\*\*\*

In a country where paid consensual sex acts between adults are usually denigrated, not to mention illegal, Poelzl knows the social opprobrium associated with such work.

After receiving an associate degree from City College in 1979, she later graduated from New College of California with a bachelor's in Human Sexuality. A slender woman of 55, with warm brown eyes and medium-length dark hair chased with silver, Poelzl sits at ease in a wing-back chair. Her hands move as she speaks, and she smiles and laughs easily. Her gaze is direct. There is no embarrassment as she talks about her work, her body, and other issues that don't normally come up in polite conversation.

"I did massage for many years, so I was very comfortable putting people at ease. I'm very comfortable with dif-

ferent body types," she says.

She started going to sex parties with a lover in the early '90s and realized there are different ways of being erotic.

"That kind of expanded my idea of whom I could be sexual with. Then, when I went to the San Francisco Sex Information Hotline training course in 1990, I saw a film of a surrogate talking about her work. I remember looking at it and thinking, 'Yeah, I could do that.'"

In 1995, Poelzl was accepted into a 10-day International Professional Surrogates Association training course, which teaches a process for working with a variety of issues, including the most common client complaints: erectile and ejaculation issues, difficulty orgasming, lack of sexual desire, physical disabilities, questioning sexual orientation, trauma and abuse, and more.

It's obvious she enjoys her work.

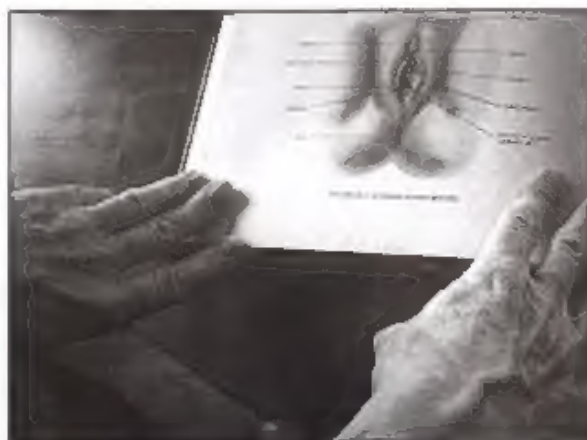
"Doing things that help people to feel better is so rewarding. Some clients are difficult, and some never seem to get much better. But in general, the people I've seen have improved. Some have had amazing changes—married, met people. It's very rewarding to have such a big impact on someone's life in such an intimate area that you usually never get any help with."

Sam certainly improved. Poelzl continued working with him, teaching him social and sexual skills. After more than 20 sessions, Sam started Internet dating. He met a woman, an academic his age, and things looked great.

"When they finally had sex she was thrilled with whatever he did, she just enjoyed it all," says Poelzl. "He told her about his condition later—this thing that had ruled his life for so long—and she's like, oh, whatever! [Some time] later I talked to his therapist for some reason, and she had just been to their wedding."

\*\*\*

Talking about her 12 years of experiences, Poelzl says, "I think of it as a spiritual calling, in a way—it's coming from a transpersonal place. I'm not being their lover in real life—I'm performing a role and a service, as a guide. That to me is very inspiring."



Linda Poelzl, a certified surrogate sex therapist, shows a page from the book, "A Child Is Born" to illustrate female genitalia. Opposite page: Poelzl demonstrates sensual touching techniques in her home office.

# Job hunting?

## Employers now require low-wage workers to pass personality tests

By Stephanie Rice

**T**he cashier who bags your groceries at that trendy supermarket was rarely absent from high school. The barista who makes your vanilla soy latte every morning doesn't mind having to obey a lot of rules. Neither do the servers at the café down the street.

They all love to listen to people talk about themselves, and each of them worries about making a good impression.

Their employers already knew this before they hired them. They knew before they ever interviewed them, or met them.

In a scramble to hire qualified workers while cutting costs, employers are turning to something that was popular during the '40s, '50s, and '60s — personality testing.

Although employers say personality testing helps streamline the hiring process, critics argue the tests go too far. Some experts even question whether the tests are a violation of workers' rights, citing issues such as privacy and the potential for discrimination.

Originally used during World War II to help place women in jobs as welders and riveters, personality testing was so controversial that after a high profile 1971 Supreme Court case, it disappeared from the workplace.

Today, more than half a century later, personality testing is making a comeback. This time, it's your average low-paying college student jobs — selling clothes, waiting tables, delivering pizza — that are requiring personality tests.

City College student Bridgette McAuliffe has taken the test twice — once for a sales position at Ross, and once for her current job as a barista at a downtown coffee shop.

"They asked whether it's OK to get stoned," McAuliffe says of the test she took at Ross.

"There's no middle ground. The questions are either too vague or too specific. It's confusing," she says.

Clad head-to-toe in a company uniform — fiery red hair pulled back under a visor with the company logo — McAuliffe navigates a plastic, yellow trash can into the depths of the underground parking garage below the coffee shop.

Tossing trash bags into a large, rather ominous-looking

trash compactor, McAuliffe criticizes the tests employers have required her to take. "It's almost more like trick questions. They'll ask you one question, and then 20 questions later, the same question again, but phrased differently. It's really, really stupid."

According to Time Magazine, at least 30 percent of companies nationwide use personality testing. Among the top Fortune 100 places to work, 89 percent use testing in hiring and promoting.

As personality testing becomes popular, experts say companies need to be cautious, making sure they don't overstep the law.

"There's been a real resurgence of testing," says Chris Wright, coordinator for San Francisco State University's Graduate Industrial and Organizational Psychology

Program. "It can be a very effective hiring tool... if it's done the right way."

But, he says, "There's a lot of room for error. There have been lawsuits around the use of personality testing."

Wright says companies are using testing for entry level employees partly because it gives them a better sense of "the soft skills that employers are looking for, like extroversion and integrity."

— Chris Wright

Employers are also looking for a way to decrease turnover and cut recruiting costs, says City College business instructor Susan Berston.

Nordstrom and Whole Foods, both Fortune 100 companies, declined to be interviewed.

Some psychologists say more laws are needed to control the growing testing industry.

"There's no legal oversight," Wright says. "It's an unregulated industry. There's so much out there, employers... might use anything."

George Shardlow, chair of City College's Behavioral Sciences Department, says there's no way of knowing whether companies have done the necessary research to back the tests they're selling.

"I don't know that those tests have been validated," Shardlow says. "I suspect that research hasn't been done."

**Companies are using testing for entry level employees partly because it gives them a better sense of 'the soft skills that employers are looking for, like extroversion and integrity.'**



Although there aren't laws specifically regulating the testing industry, there are laws that limit what employers are allowed to ask during the interview process. The Americans with Disabilities Act prohibits employers from asking about medical conditions, physical or mental, before offering someone a job.

In 1989, a man applying to be a security guard at Target sued the retail chain after it

required him to take a psychological test. The test, developed in a mental hospital in the '40s, asked the applicant to agree or disagree with statements like "My sex life is satisfactory" and "Evil possesses me at times."

Target settled the lawsuit in 1993 for \$1.5 million and stopped using the test. Today it uses testing from Unicru, the top company selling testing for hourly employees.

In the tests provided by Unicru, applicants are asked to strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with 120 statements like: "You think it's maddening when the court lets guilty criminals go free." And: "There are some people you really can't stand."

Based on the applicants' answers, Unicru assigns them a red, yellow or green light, which is forwarded to the employer with their electronic application. Green is best, yellow still has a chance, and those with red lights will most likely never make it to a first interview.

Although the test results remain in Unicru's database indefinitely, and are kept in employee personnel files, employees are not allowed to ever see their test results.

Unicru declined to be interviewed. "A lot of [the questions] are private opinion..." City College Career Counselor Karin Nelson says. "I think it might deter somebody from applying for a job."

Nelson advises students faced with personality tests to "weigh their desire to work for a place against how they feel about disclosing this much information."



PHOTO BY CECILIE MEDINA

Whole Foods requires applicants to take a personality test before they can interview for a job.

fairly clear that you can't ask any questions that are related to medical or psychological function prior to a job offer.

"Generally, well-developed tests... ask very non-invasive questions about core personality traits," he adds.

The Supreme Court case that killed the testing craze back in 1971 specifically looked at the use of an intelligence test, not a personality test. The ruling handed down, though, affected both kinds of employment testing.

The Court found that a popular intelligence test, the Wonderlic Personnel Test, was unfair to African Americans. It ruled that employers could only use testing that was directly job-related. Anything else would be a

violation of the Civil Rights Act. Personality testing disappeared from the workplace.

Wonderlic, best known today for providing intelligence testing for NFL players, still sells revised versions of its personality and intelligence tests.

The company promotes its testing as a tool for recruiters to gather information that can no longer legally be asked for in an interview.

Recruiters "are hamstrung by the legal limitations on the types of questions that candidates may be asked," Wonderlic states on its Web site.

"Even such simple questions as to whether a person is married or has children places employers at risk."

So while laws protect job seekers from prying interview questions that were common in the '40s, '50s, and '60s, Wonderlic promises companies that personality testing can still provide all they need to know.

## Test Yourself

Your responses could determine whether you get the job, or even the interview. These questions are from a personality test used by Whole Foods, Marmot, Nordstrom, and Target.

Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the following?

- You swear when you argue.
- People who talk all the time are annoying.
- There's no use having close friends; they always let you down.
- It is maddening when the court lets guilty criminals go free.
- You say whatever is on your mind.
- You get angry more often than nervous.
- When people make mistakes, you correct them.
- You have no big regrets about your past.
- You were absent very few days from high school.
- Your stuff is often kind of messy.

— Stephanie Rice

# An Appalachian Tale

By Cat Wiest



*A year ago on St. Patrick's Day, Cat Wiest sat alone in her dining room, sipping a glass of red wine and contemplating what to do next. She had just returned from an extended trip to Europe and was having trouble adjusting to life back in Santa Cruz. A few days earlier, a friend who had hiked the Appalachian Trail showed her photos of the journey she had just completed. "I could never do that," Cat thought. After finishing her wine, though, she got on the Internet and booked a one-way flight to Georgia. She decided to hike the grueling trail and had only six weeks to prepare. It would be a huge challenge.*

**a**t the end of April last year, I set forth into the woods, unsure how far or how long I would last. As a lone female with no backpacking experience, I doubted I would ever see the end of the 2,174.6-mile Appalachian Trail. To complete the granddaddy of national scenic trails, I would have to walk across 14 states — Georgia, Tennessee, North Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine. It would take me approximately five months.

Springer Mountain is the southern terminus of the trail. Last year, 1,150 hikers started from this mountain down the A.T. Only 276 of them were women. The night before I started my adventure, I was told: "It's a man's world out there, and that's just the truth."

By the end of the first day, after hiking 7.6 miles, I reached Hawk Mountain Shelter, which was occupied by about eight other hikers who ranged in age from 24 to 60. They came from all over the country. It was comforting to know I wouldn't be sleeping alone my first night. While we





**MENT DROPPED.** I was startled by the sound of rapid gunfire and M-200 explosions. The military was engaged in a training exercise. It was an **AMAZONIAN** **EXPERIENCE.** I hastily rolled up my tent, whipped up my staple breakfast of instant Oats, and broke camp. The familiar trees of home **RED, SPRUCE, AND FETTERBUSH** were nowhere. **DOUGLASS** but tall and skinny poplars were everywhere. I followed the 4"x2" white trail blazes that were painted on the trees at eye level and wrote nature haikus in my head.

Spirit walks lightly  
The feet stumble like an ox  
Does not care know me \*

Immersed in beauty and solitude, my mind wandered. I thought about my family, and my sister, who said as I was leaving, "I don't know what to think. My sister is just going out into the woods, and I don't know when she's coming back."

I didn't know either, but I was thrilled. My parents kept a food dehydrator running and mailed packages of dried turkey, beef, veggies and Snickers every two weeks. These boxes of homemade meals were the envy of camp.

After leaving Georgia, I kept my eyes peeled for bears as I made my way 163 miles into the Great Smoky Mountains. The wildlife I encountered consisted of white-tail deer and weekenders from Tennessee and Alabama. After a couple days in the national park, Clingman's Dome came into view. Its 6,643 foot summit is the highest on the trail.

That evening, I parked myself at nearby Siler's Bald Shelter. With a 17-mile day behind me, I watched the sun melt behind the mountains — Tennessee on one side, North Carolina on the other. I had made friends with a couple guys from Pennsylvania, but lost them coming out of Fontana Dam. I didn't mind. I was really starting to feel like a brave and independent mountain woman.

A vicious hailstorm bombarded the campsite that night. Thunderclaps shook the ground. The lightning, so very bright it lit up the inside of the lean-to shelter and kept me awake. Alone on the mountain that night, I cried myself to sleep in my goose-down sleeping bag, Swiss-army knife clutched tightly in my fist. Snow and ice covered the ground while I slept. Unprepared and freezing, I put my spare socks on my hands, hoisted my pack and began my ascent of Clingman's Dome. Sneakers soaked in the cold, wet mountain snow, I trudged **AND** **WENT** **STOP.** I was too cold to even pee. I hiked straight out of the Smokies. It was Mother's Day. I called my mom in San Luis Obispo and told her I had just crossed the Tennessee-North Carolina border.

Then, for the first time in weeks, I spent my first night off the trail in a bed in Hot Springs, NC. **27** **MILES** **FROM** **STARTING** **POINT.** It was the Promised Land. The

cooked our meals on our cook stoves, the conversation centered around pack weight, daily mileage, and what to do when you see a bear.

I had originally made my own stove out of beer cans. It burned denatured alcohol. "You're going to have problems," my friends told me. Everyone seemed to know what they were talking about except me, so I said nothing. I set up my two-person tent and hauled my backpack inside for **COMPANY.**

Dawn comes early in the mountains of Georgia. The



© Photos by Cat West

On top of the world: Cat West reached the summit of Mount Katahdin, the northern terminus of the Appalachian Trail, in October 2006. After five months, she had hiked 2,174.6 miles across 14 states.

we had hit, but the inn had a soft fluffy pillow (I had been using a backpacker's pillow) and a hot breakfast, plus Pop-Tarts, which my sister caught up with my gear from the store in Pennsylvania and watched me eat the beautiful garnish from behind the windows of the Sunnybank Inn.

Hiking with "Chunk" and "Pecherwach," both 24-year-old guys from Pennsylvania, was a challenge. We met on top of Springer Mountain, Georgia, at the beginning of the trail. I hiked farther than them everyday for the first week. Later, my first trail friends told me their daily motivation was to not let "that blonde girl from California stay ahead of us." They pushed me to go farther.

We celebrated our one-month anniversary, 459.5 miles into the trail, by hiking into Damascus, Va., "the friendliest town on the trail." I replaced my year-old gym shoes with proper hiking boots, slept in a church basement, picked up my food caches at the post office, and packed up the next day. We stopped at Don's tavern for a beer on the way out of town.

One thing led to another and we found ourselves invited to sit and share some beer and chicken wings...

That night, my first two owners hid behind the bushes when the moon was that 100 yards away down Mount Katahdin. It was our "last zero" day. Many times, my first owner would ask "what the hell am I doing out here, anyway." Having surpassed my original goal of one month on the trail, I exited the AT in Waynesboro, Va., to visit a friend in a nearby town. It marked my two-month trail anniversary. I stayed three days at her home, nestled among birch trees beside a small pond. We talked, lounged poolside, and baked bread. Her friends greeted me with support and encouragement. After she dropped me off near the entrance to Shenandoah National Park, I made my way alone to the next camp. As the sun went down and the fireflies came out, I continued to walk in the insect-lit dark until I found my primitive three-sided lean-to shelter. I slept with a smile on my face, because I knew I wanted Katahdin — Maine's high, snowy peak at the end of the trail.

On the other side of the Shenandoah lay Harper's Ferry, W. Va., — the unofficial halfway point of



© Photos by Cat West

the trail at 1,009 miles, — home to the Appalachian Trail Conservancy headquarters. I wrote in the ATC register "Cat's going all the way." Only 659 of the original 1,350 who started the trail made it this far. That night, it felt good to sleep in the dirt like an owl.

On my sister's 21st birthday, I crossed the Mason-Dixon line between Maryland and Pennsylvania. It marked significant progress, but it also meant the south was gone — so



the trail. The trail is a long, narrow, and winding path that runs through the heart of the Appalachian Mountains. It is a trail that has been used for centuries, and it is a trail that is still being used today. The trail is a long, narrow, and winding path that runs through the heart of the Appalachian Mountains. It is a trail that has been used for centuries, and it is a trail that is still being used today.

- Average weight of backpack: 35-45 pounds
- How much? Well, the average hiker ends up carrying between 35 and 45 pounds. This would include food and gear, but not transportation to the trailhead and occasional lodging.
- Highest point on the trail: Clingmans Dome (6,643-foot)
- Total number of people who have hiked the trail: 9,500
- Number of people who hiked the trail in 2010: 22,700 and 24,000
- The Appalachian Trail was established in 1937



Map courtesy of "Appalachian Trail" by William C. Cushman, 1937

A moose forages in the Little Swift River near Rangel Maine, 220 miles from trail's end.

move girls and Marie Haggard. A man wearing oil stained overalls at a truck-stop Dairy Queen in Bland, Va., said: "You're see'n the best part of the country right here. Don't cross that Dixie line though, soon's you get up in'ta Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York... them damn Yankees are all looked out like gypsies. But it's prob'ly the same in California."

From my duct-taped and blistered soles, whose nails were falling off, to my red swollen collarbones, I was feel-

ing the toll of my longest day on the trail - 30 miles.

Gradually, the days turned into weeks, and weeks into months, punctuated with mosquitoes, a marmoset, record-breaking heat, porcupines, the Porcids, and mountains on top of mountains. My body ached to its very core. I gained about 10 pounds. My pack weight averaged about 45 to 50 pounds — over one third of it food, chocolate and water. A lot was "useless stuff." My journal and iPod felt

like bricks. An incredibly light-weight titanium cooking pot made up for a 12-bar of crayons. A holly bag with holes cut for the straps served as a rain cover. Weight and space were saved by using Clorox to treat water instead of carrying a filter. My parents included magazines in my food drops, mostly tabloids, and the occasional "Women's Adventure" with Post-It notes on the front reading "I'm trying to inspire you to write."

I hiked with others who were also on their own. Trail names are common on thru-hikes like this. "Miss Direction" from Texas, "Cudd" from Georgia and I probably would never have met in real life. Together we can-

quered the White Mountains, providing support for each other, as one by one, our spirits broke under the weight of our backpacks.

On our ascent of 6,288 foot Mt. Washington in New Hampshire an ice storm blew in.

"Come hell or high water — we are making it to the next hut," Cudd yelled. I almost lost his words in the 55 mph wind. The hail felt like birdshot against on my bare legs. It seemed to be coming from every direction when the lightning started. Well above our barline (where cautionous, not too unforgiving even for trees to survive) there was nowhere to go but up. We had no choice. We ran blind for three miles through flashes of lightning and sheets of rain to the nearest hut. Our boots were covered in ice. My legs had been lashed by the sleet and hail, and we were thoroughly soaked. When we threw open the door to the hut, about a hundred well dressed "day hikers" greeted us. We screamed in excitement as sleet and rain pounded the hut. Lightning lit up the windows. The hut master ran to get warm blankets and hot soup. We felt invigorated and alive and slightly hypothermic.

**The trail sign read:  
'Welcome to Maine, the  
way life should be.' With  
only 281 miles to go, I  
walked into a state I  
never dreamed I would  
reach.**

With August and the Whites behind us, the sign on the side of the trail read: "Welcome to Maine, the way life should be." With only 281 miles to go, I walked into a state I never dreamed I would reach.

Maine's full of maples, bogs, moose and bridgeless rivers, which required fording. As we pushed a canoe into a pond near our campsite one morning, we spotted a cow moose not too far away. It was larger than my mom's mini van. She looked up briefly, then plunged her head back into the water for more grass. I slowly chewed on dried mango and watched the "swamp donkey" dine. The day was sunny and warm, the leaves were beginning to turn and I was having breakfast with a moose.

On October 7 — a week before my 29th birthday, my friends and I eagerly woke at 3 a.m., walked over to the Baxter State Park ranger station, and registered as thru hikers. Gathering water from Kancamash Stream, we began our final ascent under the light of a full moon. On our way to the summit sheets of ice covered the rocks and Thoreau Springs was frozen over. In four miles we climbed 4,000 feet. Some parts, almost vertical, required hand over hand climbing.

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jumping, pushing, and pulling. We reached the "table land," a long flat rocky stretch, before the final pitch.

Sunrise greeted us warmly on the northern terminus of the Appalachian Trail. We touched the trail sign, scrambled bagged, and drank a cup of tea, when I had hiked 110 miles. Standing atop Baxter Peak on Mt. Katahdin, we had an unobstructed view of the world.

At the last trail blaze, I knelt down and touched the rock whose white stripe was to be the final marker of this journey. Looking south, I found it hard to believe that I had stood on Springer Mountain thinking I could only walk to Virginia. I stayed with my friends on the mountain for what seemed like hours, knowing that the next day would take us all in wildly different directions.

In 2006, 222 men and 88 women completed the entire length of the Appalachian Trail. I am proud to be one of them. Friends teased and criticized me for traveling around the world without really seeing my own country. Well, now I can say I have thoroughly explored a slice of 14 states — on foot, I saw a lot.

It has been a year since I stood on Springer Mountain in Georgia not knowing what I was doing. Months have passed since I summited Katahdin — not grasping what I had done. I hear from at least one hiking buddy per week, the bond of thru-hiking breaking the monotony of our oft-



PHOTO BY C. WOOD


trail lives.

The trail changed me in ways I am only beginning to understand. I feel a confidence now that I didn't have before. I really can do anything. Every now and then, riding the MUNI, or waiting at a red light on my bicycle, I think about the trail and all that dirt and pain — and I feel a little homesick.

## REST STOP

By C. Wood  
A hiker's perspective on the Appalachian Trail, from Springer Mountain to Baxter Peak.

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A month



# Angels on the highway

*How a trip to Lake Tahoe went horribly wrong*

*By Rebecca Bruckfield*

As Haley yanked the wheel, her car drifted from the fast lane onto the shoulder of the center median.

"Haley, watch out," warned her friend, Katelynd, who was riding shotgun.

After that, there was a silence," recalls Carlos, who was sitting behind Katelynd. To the left of Carlos sat 16-year-old Stelci. It was her first trip to the snow.

With both hands, Haley jerked the steering wheel to the right, as her Toyota Corolla crossed into the next lane. She then wrestled the car back toward the center.

The Corolla barreled up the sloped grassy median, crossing east and westbound lanes, and vaulted over the guardrail toward oncoming traffic.

The last thing Carlos remembers is the silhouette of the

person behind the windshield of the white Ford Expedition into which they were about to plow.

Moments later, Carlos regained consciousness. The air was thick with the smell of fire extinguisher chemicals and black smoke. He fanned his face with his right hand to clear the air in front of him.

It was shortly after 11:30 a.m.

After hitting the Ford Expedition head-on in the fast lane and pinballing off a BMW, Haley's Corolla came to rest in the grass on the far right shoulder of westbound Interstate 80 in Arroyo Viejo, just west of Carson City.

The Expedition, still in the fast lane, was engulfed in flames. Westbound traffic stood still, blocked by the chaos.

A man reached in through the shattered back window



and dabbed at the blood on Carlos' face with a cloth rag.

Something was wrong with Carlos' hands. He couldn't move them. They were stuck. And his back hurt.

A paramedic asked him, "Do you know where you are?" Carlos remembered seeing "CITY OF VACAVILLE" printed in gold letters on the side of a red fire department ambulance.

The paramedics cautiously lifted Carlos and Katelynd from the car and placed them on stretchers. Meanwhile, another paramedic used the Jaws of Life to cut through the car's caved-in roof to get to Halley and Stella. It sounded like a chainsaw. Carlos squeezed his eyes shut to keep out the flying metal particles.

On the way to the hospital, he lost consciousness again.

Saturday, January 20, started out cool and cloudy. Three City College students and a friend were getting ready for a weekend trip to Lake Tahoe.

Halley Gelpke, a 20-year-old City College student, had declined a party invitation the night before so that she could pack for the trip. She dyed her hair red. She bought tire chains, just in case. She wanted to get an early start the next morning.

At 9:45 a.m., Katelynd Galloway-Smith, a 19-year-old City College student, tossed some necessities into a handbag. She exchanged hugs and kisses with her mother, Heather Galloway, and headed out the door to Halley's silver '93 Toyota Corolla.

As Katelynd departed, her mother recited her usual goodbye mantra: "Have fun. Be careful. Ground the car. Use your angels."

Next, Halley and Katelynd picked up Carlos Reyes, 20, also a City College student. His father, Carlos Sr., sent him off with, "Be safe. Call when you get there."

They drove to Stella Kraft's house in South San Francisco. Halley and Stella's mothers were best friends and their daughters grew up like sisters. Inside, Stella, a 16-year-old South San Francisco High School student, traded I love-yous with her parents, Robin and Gordon Kraft, and her 14-year-old brother, Christopher.

Robin told Carlos, "Take care of those girls for us."

Everyone fastened their seatbelts. They waved and drove away.

Halley's iPod poured tunes through the car stereo.

On their way out of town, they crossed the Bay Bridge

and headed east on I-80 en route to a cabin just outside of South Lake Tahoe, where they were going to spend the weekend celebrating the birthday of a friend who was to meet them there.

Halley's mother, Denise Lewis, said that the group was "going up to party in a safe environment. They were trying to grow up."

An open bottle of Grey Goose Vodka and some marijuana were found in the trunk at the scene of the accident, according to Officer "Willy" Whitford of the California Highway Patrol. No drugs or alcohol were found in the front of the car, Carlos said that no one had been drinking or smoking pot that day. Halley's, Stella's, and Katelynd's toxicology and blood alcohol tests came back negative.

During their hour-long drive together, Katelynd and Halley engaged in lively conversation in the front seat.

In the back seat, Stella turned to Carlos and asked,

"Are you gonna make snow angels?"

In the fast lane, they held steady with the flow of traffic at a speed of 65 to 70 miles per hour.

Since childhood, she had been a struggle for Katelynd.

At 8, she was diagnosed with epilepsy after she began having petit and grand mal seizures.

At 9, her mother was diagnosed with uterine and ovarian cancer and nearly died.

At 14, Katelynd lost her left leg while riding on the back of a

Harley Davidson motorcycle driven by her father. A car traveling in the opposite direction sideswiped them. Her pelvis broke in three places and her leg needed to be amputated above the knee. Two close family friends who were riding another motorcycle right behind them were hit head-on and killed by the same car.

After more than a dozen surgeries, Katelynd received a red, white and blue prosthetic leg on Sept. 11, 2001.

Katelynd's friend since kindergarten, Pilar Alcega, a 20-year-old City College student, remembers that after the motorcycle accident, "Katelynd became more powerful. She was brighter. . . . She didn't show how much pain she was in. . . . She [always] kept a smile on her face."

Three days into this semester, Katelynd was taking U.S. History, Speech, and English classes at City College. She was thinking of pursuing a career as a coroner or forensic pathologist.

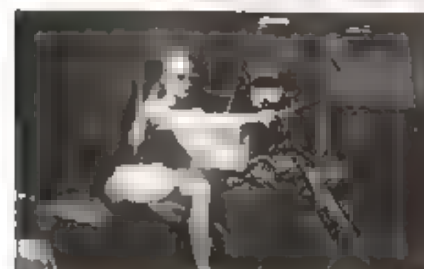
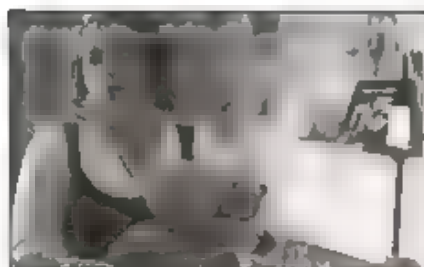
Mo Martin, who taught Katelynd math at City College the previous two semesters, called her "a beam of light."



Katelynd Galloway-Smith

Halley Gelpke

Stella Kraft



Katelynd's mother



Shortly after the accident, Katelynd's parents sifted through the daughter's mementos — her senior year trophy for "Best Prosecutor" in a mock trial competition against Lowell High School; a photo of her acting debut as Kate in "Out of the Frying Pan" at San Francisco School of the Arts; and her pink elephant slip-on sneakers. They're all now nestled in the display on her father's fireplace mantle and hearth.

Katelynd was obsessed with elephants — elephant shoes, elephant earrings, elephant-you-name-it. Late last year, she had one of her many elephant doodles transformed into a tattoo on her hip, with plans to add a baby elephant tattoo each time she had a child. Since the accident, a dozen people have been tattooed with Katelynd's elephant.

In Jeff Smith's cozy dining room, a giant gold heart outlines a photo cutout of his daughter, Katelynd, on black construction paper. In the center, a pre-teen Katelynd poses on a Harley Davidson in a pink tulle angel costume.

Six weeks after the crash, Halley's mother, Denise, cries as she speaks of her only child.

She named her daughter after Halley's Comet — a celestial body that orbits the sun and is only visible once every 75 years. Denise describes her as "bright, beautiful and confident."

Halley enrolled at the beginning of the semester in astronomy and sociology classes, but she was also interested in fashion journalism.

Her bedroom is meticulously decorated. A loveseat draped with an African patterned fabric hugs one wall, accented by a fuzzy zebra-striped cushion. A British flag billows from the ceiling. A brightly colored bank tapestry covers her bed. One wall is plastered with postcards and magazine photos, many of '50s heartthrob James Dean.

Carlos and his girlfriend, Kelly Shasky, remember times when Halley's room was filled with her friends. "They were her life," said her mother. They still stop by to hang out there.

Stella Kraft was a homebody. After school on Friday, Robin asked her daughter why she wasn't out with friends. Stella said that the only place she wanted to be was at home with her best friend — her brother, who she

called "Chris Kraft."

Her room is furnished with a white four poster bed topped with baby blue cotton bedding, a small video library of "The OC," the comedy series with which she kept in touch with her friends; a poster of Britney Spears; the black City Lights Bookstore bag she had with her when she left for Los Angeles to get guitar lessons.

Stella's mother describes her as "funny, loud, and outgoing." She enjoyed reading "Catcher in the Rye" and listening to her favorite band, Bright Eyes. She loved George W. Bush and wasn't afraid to say so.

She was also a big fan of race driver Kevin Harvick, winner of the Daytona 500. She wore a Kevin Harvick T-shirt the day of the crash. She called him "Kevin the Rock."

Stella was going to star as Jasmine in South San Francisco High School theater production of "Aladdin." The production, scheduled to open three days after the crash, was cancelled.

Before losing consciousness in the ambulance on the way to UC Davis, Carlos learned that Halley and Stella died at the scene of the accident.

Audrey Jewelsyn Craig, the driver of the Ford Expedition and mother of





On Saturday, Jan. 10, 1997, a small plane crashed into a car on a highway near Yuba, Calif.

two young girls, also died.

Despite major head injuries, Katelynd was still breathing when paramedics arrived on the scene. She was airlifted to John Muir Medical Center in Walnut Creek, where she took her final breath the next day at 4:14 p.m., according to the coroner's report, 20 minutes after doctors ended

their bed.

"We were supposed to go see Bright Eyes," her mother said. "She wasn't supposed to die. It was like she disappeared."

Carlos had to drop his City College classes — English, Sociology, Speech and Men's Health — after the

fatal. Carlos sat on his living room sofa with his neck in a brace, with his feet cast. He was in mourning for his mother, Magdalena, his younger siblings Henry, 19, Edwin, 16, Magda, 14, and his girlfriend, Kelly.

None of them seemed to want to let him out of their sight for someone who has been

The Corolla barreled up the sloped grassy median dividing east and west bound lanes, and vaulted over the guardrail toward oncoming traffic. The last thing Carlos remembers is the silhouette of the person behind the windshield of the white Ford Expedition into which they were about to plunge.

life support.

Katelynd's ashes are in a brown plastic box on the desk in her bedroom, topped by her sunglasses and a little gold angel. Her father plans to take his daughter's remains on his Harley to South Dakota for interment in the family plot.

Halley's ashes are enshrined on an altar in the family room, surrounded by photos and memorial cards. They will be scattered in a few of her favorite places in the Sierra.

Stella's are in a cardboard box inside a red, crushed velvet drawstring bag between her parents' pillows on

accident, which occurred only a few days into the spring semester.

He's still recovering from his injuries. A concussion. Three lacerations on his scalp. Two cuts on his face from his glasses. Two black eyes. A fractured vertebra in his neck. A fractured rib. A lacerated liver and a fractured wrist. A mangled right pinky finger.

He misses talking to Halley on the phone, Katelynd dropping by to visit, and skateboarding on the mini ramp on Stella's driveway.

Days after his release from the hos-

pital, Carlos appears to be taking everything in stride. The future doesn't scare him. "I'll have less fear, skate harder," he says.

The injuries he sustained to his body are expected to heal within a year. Recovering from the loss of three friends will take longer.

Stella's mom, Robin, summed up the loss of her daughter as she gazed at the bright blue sky through the family room's sliding glass door. "It just doesn't feel the same," she said. "Even though it's a sunny day it seems all gloomy."

# The undocumented

By Ashwin Sudhi

**T**he northbound train was bound for Cuernavaca, Mexico. The train was crowded and Erika's mother charged a fee to get a place for Erika on the crowded day of travel. A coyote helped Erika cross the Mexican American frontera on foot.

On the first night they slept in a tent of San Diego in the outskirts of the Anza Borrego Desert, among the wood rats, tarantulas and prickly pear cacti.

On the second night the coyote found them.

Like he had so many times before, the "coyote" collected his payment and loaded them into his rusted pickup truck. They drove for three hours and arrived at Los Angeles International Airport that night. The coyote left

them at the curb with two plane tickets. He told them that was the end of the agreement.

Erika and her mother Erika boarded a plane bound for San Francisco, more than 3,000 miles away from the home in Central Mexico. Roberto, Erika's father, met them there and escorted them to the next part of their journey: life in America.

\*\*\*

By 2004, Erika had resided in the United States for more than a decade. On this side of the border she had learned to walk and talk.

At 12, she started junior high at James Lick Middle School. She needed books for the coming semester so she





# American Dream

asked her mother to fill out a library form. When Leticia reached the nine boxes beneath the heading "Social Security number," she stopped. That's when Erika found out. She wasn't a citizen.

"I'm not an American?" Erika asked her mother. "But I'm not a Mexican either... Que soy?"

As she approached her teens, Erika suddenly was confronted by a system that was rejecting her.

Her parents wished there was more they could have done to prevent this day from happening. But, according to the law, undocumented immigrants cannot apply for citizenship until they prove they have been in the country for at least 10 years.

They would also need someone to sponsor their citizenship. Erika's father arranged for a relative to be his sponsor in the early '90s. He submitted an application for himself in the late '90s in the hopes of sponsoring his own family.

But according to Guadalupe Siordia Ortiz, a close family friend, Roberto's paperwork inched along. Erika's "only hope [became] amnesty," she says.

She and her family waited for a re-statement of the amnesty bills, but in the wake of newly perceived threats to homeland security, the 21st century proved more restrictive.

In 2001, Roberto got his green card, or legal perm...



## MAY DAY PROTEST



rent residence.

In 2004, it was Erika's turn. Although her family paid more than \$2,000 in legal consultation fees, her court case is still waiting to be heard. It could take up to 19 years.

Meanwhile, people like her have begun disappearing. In the latter half of 2006, Immigration and Customs Enforcement—newly empowered by the Patriot Act and the Secure Fence Act—raided homes and deported more than 14,000 undocumented immigrants across the country.

In January 2007, Erika worried that she might be next. During a 10-day period, ICE invaded nearby Contra Costa County homes and businesses looking for illegal immigrants as part of Operation Return-to-Sender. They made 119 arrests with only 20 deportation orders. They called the others collateral arrests.

After hearing about federal officers going door to door and eliciting unwarranted confessions, Erika stopped going out after school, fearing she might be arrested and deported.

"You never know what's going to happen," she says. "I don't want to be at the wrong place at the wrong time."

Attorney Mark Silverman, director of immigration policy for the Immigration Legal Resource Center in downtown San Francisco, reassures undocumented residents like Erika. On nights and weekends, he visits the schools and churches in immigrant neighborhoods, offers advice, and tries to calm the panic.

He delivers an optimistic message — that with the com-

munity's support, comprehensive policy reforms should pass this year.

"Everyone recognizes that our system is broken," he says. "And we need an immigration overhaul."

But while issues are debated, he says, policymakers should free the immigrant children who are being held hostage in the process.

"These children didn't ask to come here," Silverman says. "But their life decisions are being made by adults both sides of the border."

The DREAM Act addresses just that. It is an acronym for the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors, and it resonates with Dr. Martin Luther King's dream. After a century of segregated neighborhoods, Chinatowns, slums and Bracero labor abuses, this act would give a new generation of immigrants legal access to the American dream.

Mark Silverman thinks it's reason enough for Erika to stop worrying and keep dreaming.

When Erika began high school three years ago, her struggle for citizenship took a back seat to her studies. She dreamed of UC Berkeley and Harvard, and hoped her legal standing would work itself out. It was her secret. Not even her best friends were aware of her status.

She volunteered after school as a peer counselor. Then, she stayed up late at night to finish her homework. On weekends, she translated at legal clinics for pro bono attorneys and their Spanish speaking clients. She began explor-





OPERATION RETURN TO SENDER

ing her own ambitions of becoming an immigration attorney.

"Sometimes I put others above me," she says. "I would not want anyone to go through what I've gone through."

Frika prepared to apply for college her junior year. She collected scholarship forms, financial aid packets and job applications.

Not one was submitted

\*You always get to the third line in those applications

wants from me," she says.

Today, at 17, she says the system is treating her like half a person. She's got her heart set on a master's degree, and she plans to start City College in the fall. But doing so at the age of 18 will be complicated.

By current laws, Erika's residence in the U.S. will only be tolerated for another year. If she doesn't get her green card by the time she's an adult, she'll be guilty of "unlaw

The DREAM Act is an acronym for the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors, and it resonates with Dr. Martin Luther King's dream. This act would give a new generation of immigrants legal access to the American dream.

and it asks for a Social Security number," she says with a shrug.

And at school, she found that college required courses were either overcrowded or unavailable. She fought for seats in geometry and biology classes. But because her freshman grades weren't high enough, counselors told her the classes were full.

"Why do I work my ass off when they are just making my choices for me?" she asked.

Erika bounced around three different high schools. Last fall, she had a 4.0 G.P.A. Still, no doors opened.

"Some times, I don't understand what this country

ful presence. At that point, she would have no right to enter Mexico, or face criminal charges that would preclude her from returning to this country.

However, if she chooses to return to Mexico, and file a waiver with the U.S. consulate, she would have to do so alone. Today, Erika is the last remaining undocumented member of her immediate family.

But proving she needs to be with her family in America could take up to 10 years, according to the National Immigration Law Center. It would be Froka's first time back on Mexican soil since she was an infant.

"Something tells me I don't belong there. Mexico hasn't

given me anything," she says. "I've gotten my education here. I've grown. I've come through. I have been here."

Nearly 17 years ago, Celaya Erika's birthplace — was a declining agricultural center in an industrializing Mexico. While the city underwent its slow reconstruction, Erika's family struggled to put food on their table.

"In Mexico, we couldn't give Erika a good life," her father says. They could hardly afford Erika's vaccinations.

A few weeks after Erika's birth, Roberto left to find work in America. But when the baby began crying for

her father, a doctor had already told her husband to San Francisco.

Within a year, she had a son, and took an under-the-table minimum wage job at a clothing store to help support the family.

Now, they live in Daly City, where Roberto continues to work as a truck driver and Leticia is looking for a second job. She's saving to pay for Erika's tuition fees.

Neither parent seems bothered by the fact that their life is far from the American Dream. But what does bother them is that their daughter is caught in the political debate that prevents her from pursuing her dreams.

For 25 years, Mark Silverman, a celebrated immigrant here,

There is something about them, he says. They are here because they were people who had the determination to change their lives."

Today, it is optimistic optimism. The DREAM Act will empower the bright and talented young students that are enrolled in our nation's public universities.

Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) points to the "inspiring interest" of her talented students who have clearly achieved the American dream with a passion toward becoming responsible, contributing, law-abiding members of our society.

The DREAM Act offers to help admitted college students access the financial resources that will allow them to realize their dreams.

It was co-authored by two Senators, Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) and Richard Durbin (D-Ill.), and has sponsors from both parties. After three years of legislative process, Congress this March as part of a comprehensive immigration bill, will pass it early as this summer.

The State of California is doing the groundwork for its passage. In 2007, the State Assembly signed AB 540, California's Dream Act—allowing undocumented students to pay lower resident tuition fees.

In the meantime, California's community colleges have made a commitment to accept and enroll undocumented students.

María Lopez, former CCSF assistant teacher, says, "I've been privileged to see the doors to college wide open."

But Erika's story is continuing to evolve. She's needs the federal endorsement of the bill to stay in the United States and to fulfill her dream of becoming a doctor.

The DREAM Act is the most important step to prevent Erika from being deported.

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Units	MWF	9-10 a.m.	Phelan Campus, Bngl 115	Conzatti
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#### JOUR 21: News Writing and Reporting

Units	Tu	10-11 a.m.	Phelan Campus, Bngl 115	Conzatti
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#### JOUR 22: Feature Writing

Units	R	6:30-9:45 p.m.	1900 Market St. Rm. 406	Rachewitz
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Units	TR	11 a.m.-12:30	Mission Campus, Rm. 218	Graham
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#### JOUR 23: Electronic Copy Editing

Units	Tu	10-11 a.m.	Phelan Campus, Bngl 115	Conzatti
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#### JOUR 24: Newspaper Laboratory

Units	MWF	Noon-1 p.m.	Phelan Campus, Bngl 214	Conzatti
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#### JOUR 27: Newspaper Design/Pagination

Units	Tu	10-11 a.m.	Phelan Campus, Bngl 115	Conzatti
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#### JOUR 29: Magazine Editing & Production

Units	Tu	7-9 p.m.	Phelan Campus, Bngl 214	Conzatti
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#### JOUR 31: Internship Experience

Exp	Hours	Phelan Campus, Bngl 214	Conzatti
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#### JOUR 37: Intro to Photojournalism

Units	W	7-10 p.m.	Phelan Campus, Bngl 214	Lillard
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Units	TR	9-10-11 a.m.	Mission Campus, Rm. 217	Lillard
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# MAKING THE HOMELESS COUNT

*The headline in the April issue of the Street Sheet read "6,377 Or 8,000? Or 10,000? Who knows?" The recent homeless count in San Francisco can be spun many ways. The numbers don't tell the whole story*

*By T.J. Johnston*

When the war in Iraq started in March 2003, I had been out of work for almost eight months and was down to my last \$30. I was worried about where my next meal would come from. I knew I could get fed at Glide and St. Anthony's. But I went to Marin de Porres on Potrero Hill, instead. No one would know I was there.

When I went to their soup kitchen, I found a half dozen people sitting at a table with a green salad. I was the only one there. I was the only one who was not a regular. I was the only one who was not a regular.

After a while, I found out that the soup kitchen was not a soup kitchen. It was a soup kitchen.



Roger, a former engineer

elderly, the unemployed, the mentally ill.

I heard enough horror stories about homeless shelters to make me want to avoid them. Fortunately, I never had to stay in one.

When I saw the ad in January's Street Sheet calling for volunteers to count homeless people in the city, I felt qualified. I was almost evicted myself and I had previously worked for the Census Bureau.

I called the homeless coordinating board and volunteered. At 6:30 p.m., on January 31, I arrived for orientation at the Department of Public Health at Polk and Grove streets, across from City Hall.

At the pep rally preceding our training session, Mayor Gavin Newsom noted the "audacity of calling for a 10-year plan to end homelessness." Project Homeless Connect, he said, is a model for more than 100 U.S. cities with similar programs.

"Don't be distressed," Newsom said in reference to the number of homeless we might encounter. "Be optimistic."

At 8:10 p.m. that same night, Victor (another volunteer) and I drove to a 16-block area South of Market. We covered Market, Howard and Folsom between Fifth and Ninth streets.

At Sixth and Shipley, we encountered a man sleeping on the sidewalk outside a car wash. One.

At Sixth and Natoma, another homeless man was retir-

ing for the night outside an apartment building. Two.

At Seventh and Langton, behind the Universal Sign Company, a man was dumpster diving, with shopping cart in tow. Three.

By 9:45 p.m., we had counted a total of nine residentially deprived people. The area we canvassed, a hotbed of poverty, seemed like a ghost town. Where did the homeless go that night?

About 500 volunteers conduct this biennial census of the homeless for the city's Human Services Agency. It's a prerequisite for a multi-million dollar grant from the U.S. Housing and Urban Development Department (HUD).

As one who collects data and statistics for a research firm, I always question how numbers are compiled and interpreted.

For instance, during his administration (1996-2004), Mayor Willie Brown said 5,000 people were homeless in San Francisco, while reporting 15,000 to HUD.

"The definition of homelessness in the city is pushing a cart outside," said Miguel Carrera of the Coalition on Homelessness (COH).

Between 2003 and 2005, after Gavin Newsom succeeded Brown, the number of street people dropped dramatically — one could say magically — from 8,640 to 6,248, a drop of 28 percent.

In his annual address on homelessness on Dec. 14, 2006, Newsom said, "Since we started, 4,795 human beings are no longer on the sidewalks and the streets."

At the end of March of this year, the mayor's office announced its latest findings. The number of homeless people — 6,377 — increased slightly from 2005. Yet Newsom declared victory by comparing the stats to 2002 figures, which allowed him to claim that the number of homeless had declined by 38 percent. Go figure.

Our trainer refers to route maps that specifies the areas we're assigned to cover. Colored dots signify "hot spots" of homeless congregation. The zones marked in green are deemed safe for volunteers, while the cross-hatched zones are restricted to police and Park and Rec employees.

The checklist requires us to indicate the location of the intersections where we spot homeless people. In addition to gender, race and/or ethnicity, we also note if the people are single or part of a family unit, youths or adults. We're also instructed to note signs of shopping carts, homeless encampments and vehicular housing. If they have pets, we mark that down, too.

"There is no need to make contact," says Lt. David Lazar of SFPD's Field Operations Bureau, which sounds more like an order.

Well, no one contacted Tony, a 38-year-old Italian who formerly sold timeshares and lived in Japantown and now resides under a walkway bridge in the same neighborhood.



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PHOTO BY CLAUDE MILLER

Cherise, who has lived on the streets since 2005, sits out

the count.

The dark-haired immigrant, who spends his days playing soccer in a nearby park, said the homeless count was news to him. People are being treated like numbers, he said. "It would be better to have a conversation and exchange words (with us)."

The head count was only one phase of the operation, says Alison Schlageter, a policy analyst for the Local Homeless Coordinating Board that was in charge of the count.

"Simultaneously, we were counting (homeless people) in emergency shelters, transitional housing programs, mental health facilities, drug and alcohol treatment, hospitals and the San Francisco County Jail," Schlageter points out.

Among the service centers, which were not included in the last count, were St. Anthony's, Mission Neighborhood Health Center, the Bayview Drop-in Clinic and Larkin Street Youth Services.

Regardless, a lot of people were missed. Schlageter concedes that a one-time-only count has its limitations. Areas where the homeless hide themselves, such as abandoned buildings, aren't included.

Despite these shortcomings, Schlageter stands by the

numbers. "San Francisco did the most complete coverage they ever did for a homeless count."

Daniel Doherty, 45, of the Bronx, tried to get a menial janitorial job through a relative in the city. After stints in a madroom and recycling center, he now pushes a cart through the Tenderloin. Wearing a plaid shirt, his hair and beard matted, Doherty makes extra money off recycling cans and bottles that he collects, while awaiting an unemployment appeal. He's been homeless off and on for about four years. The count was also news to him. "They're looking at us as though we're all worthless," he says.

Bob Offer Westcott, development coordinator for the Coalition on Homelessness and editor of its homeless-distributed newspaper Street Sheet, says, "I expected [the count] to be fairly low."

As a part-time City College student, he volunteered as part of an eight-person team to cover North Beach, the Marina and Fisherman's Wharf. His team split into two groups and counted 10 people in three hours.

"Given the number of people they had, it was pretty efficient," he says. "The number of volunteers affected the number counted."

But, he says, HUD's methodology and timing — or worse — results in undercounting.

"If it gets to one-third of the homeless people, I'd be surprised," says Steven Chester, a City College alum and COH volunteer who was once homeless. Chester says one night isn't enough time for an accurate count. "What needs to be done is a survey done over a few weeks," he said.

Carrera, COH's coordinator for Families of Immigrants Project, notes that immigrant families staying in shelters and doubling in single-resident occupancy hotels — barely one step above shelters in the housing food chain — are likely overlooked in such a tally.

Outreach worker Karl Starr, who lives in a van, also points out, "If you're holding any kind of paper (warrant or citation), by second nature you'll be careful about it." He's referring to quality-of-life violations, such as loitering, panhandling and sleeping on the sidewalk. As a result, he says the actual homeless count would be two to three times higher than the city's.

On Powell Street, one block away from Union Square, a denture 62-year-old woman stands on the sidewalk in front of the Disney Store and holds out a cup. Barbara, who made her career in the hospitality and retail trades, first experienced homelessness in 1986. She has stayed on benches and in shelters. Currently, she is staying in an SRO in the Tenderloin. Unhardened by street life, she keeps a dignified demeanor. The spare change she seeks supplements her \$925 monthly disability check.

Upon hearing about the count, Barbara says, "I don't think (the homeless) mind." However, she says the method is impersonal — "like counting cattle."

# Domestic Survival:

## Negotiating safety & sexuality

By Alison Smith

**T**rying to reconcile the myths he grew up hearing, with the truth he's now learning, a guy in his mid-20s seated in the back of the classroom says, "I have a really strong sex drive, but I've never raped anybody."

Leslie Simon nods and responds, "That's right, because it's a myth that rapes are caused by uncontrollable sex drives."

Simon and two dozen students enrolled in a health class are discussing rape, domestic abuse and how to prevent unhealthy relationships as part of presentation by Project SURVIVE, a peer-education program. Simon, a professor and Women's Studies chair at City College, founded the program in 1993. By the end of this year, Project SURVIVE will have visited 200 high school and college classrooms.

Dressed in black with a soft pink blazer, the silver-haired guest speaker gets right down to business. Her delivery is rapid fire and enthusiastic, and within minutes students begin raising their hands, asking questions, and sharing their stories.

"I have a friend who told her mother she was raped, and her mother blamed her for it," says a Latina student, rushing her words.

Simon points out that blaming the victim is common. But, she says, it's a myth that some women "ask for it."

Part of Project SURVIVE's approach is to debunk myths about rape, and Simon is a master at it.

"Imagine you're on a secluded road in the backseat of a car," Simon tells the class. "You're naked because you're having sex with someone you're excited to be having sex with. Suddenly you hear, TAP! TAP! TAP! It's a cop knocking on the window with his flashlight, which he shines in your eyes. What do you do? Do you say, 'Sorry officer, but I have this uncontrollable sex drive, and you're going to have to wait for me to finish up?' No, you don't. What you do is reach for your pants—quickly. You're able to do this because sex drives are controllable."

Simon created this hypothetical example to help students learn how to protect themselves from violence and to navigate the complex terrain of intimacy.

Christina Gonzalez, a SURVIVE peer educator studying health education, says, "I did a presentation at a high school and one of the young ladies said, 'My boyfriend



Project SURVIVE founder Leslie Simon, in her. Photo by of

pressures me to have sex but I just go along with it. It's not a big deal."

"And that's the problem," Gonzalez says. "It is a big deal."

Mica Chavez-Larimer, who started working with Project SURVIVE a year ago, says that programs like SURVIVE need to reach more young people. Sipping coffee at the Rosenberg Library on campus, she laments, "If I had been 20 years old seeing the presentation and getting that information, things might have been different for me."

The presentation this day begins with building a diagram of a healthy relationship on the chalkboard. Students are asked to shout out their ideas, and words like "respect," "trust," and "kindness" are written on the green chalkboard. Next comes the message: rape and domestic abuse are far more prevalent than you think, and they don't just destroy relationships—they destroy people.

"People withdraw and suffer from depression and other mental illnesses related to trauma," says Chavez-Larimer of the pain caused by domestic violence. "The trauma teaches them that unhealthy relationships are the norm."

Brenda Molina joined Project SURVIVE two years ago to help people avoid such trauma. Her thick, black hair is pulled back, and dark eyehner highlights her eyes. Although Molina is young, she projects the composure of someone twice her age.



Peer educator Mike Long illustrates the cycle of



"I grew up with a lot of young women in situations where they didn't understand what was happening to them," she says. "My dad works as a counselor so I grew up knowing about abuse at a young age. I wanted to help people, and Project SURVIVE seemed like a good way to start."

To become peer educators, students are required to take two classes taught by Simon—the Politics of Sexual

#### Violence and Ending Sexual Violence

"When you teach people about sex," says Simon, "you teach them about when sex can go wrong. You also teach them how to have safer sex, nonviolent sex, fun sex, and no babies—unless you want them sex. All of that can and should happen together."

Jessi Ross, a SURVIVE educator, works at an STD clinic, and as a dancer. Wearing an old, hooded sweatshirt, cut-off pants, and worn-down sneakers, Ross looks like she'd be just as comfortable in a punk club. "Leslie's great at recognizing people's attributes," she says. "I do sex work myself and Leslie knew that. So when we were discussing porn and sexual assault she asked me to talk to the class. She enables her stu-

dents to become leaders."

After a year of training, students become peer educators. A look back at recent history shows what they're up against.

Oregon became the first U.S. state to pass legislation forbidding a husband to rape his wife in 1978. Legislators in other states spent the next 15 years debating the wisdom



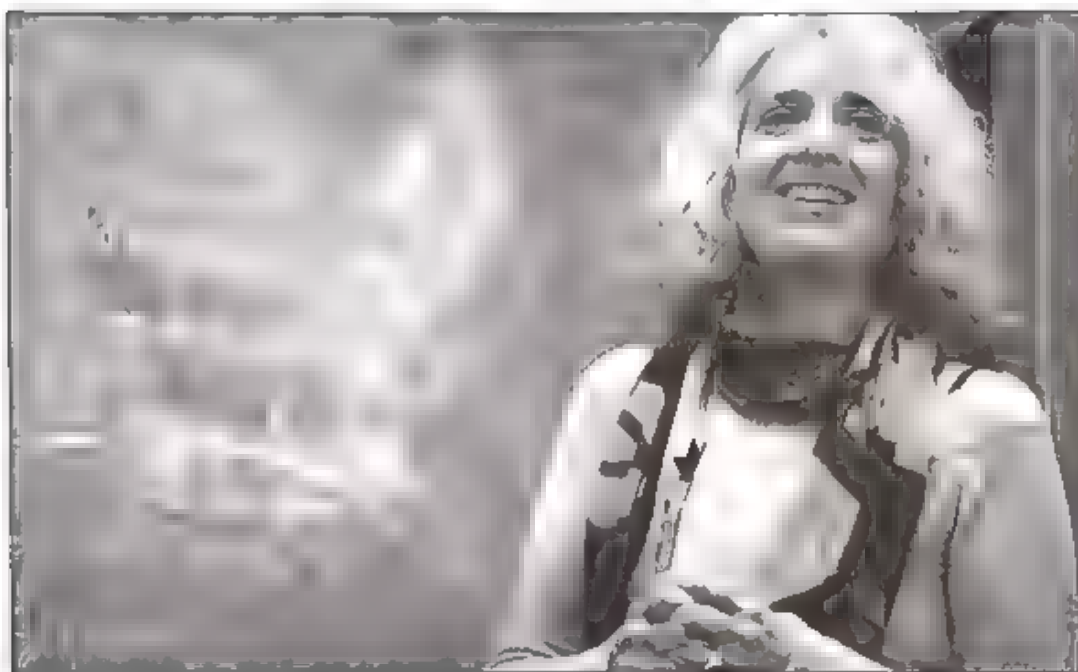


PHOTO BY CORY REC

Leslie Simon helps students understand where violence

of Oregon's decision, and did not outlaw marital rape until 1993.

According to Project SURVIVE, one out of four females in the U.S. is sexually assaulted by the time they're 18.

Former SURVIVE educator Felicia Tatoya says, "I don't think society knows how to deal with this issue. Women are scared to report it, but men might be more scared."

Simon says people are afraid to report being raped because of the humiliation. "When you're blaming the victim," she says, "you're not doing anything about the perpetrator."

Most victims of child abuse don't become abusers, but abusers always have trauma in their backgrounds, she notes. "Very few people are born needing to hurt others."

Project SURVIVE teaches students how to spot abusers. "People are most commonly raped by people they know," says Tatoya. "It's not usually someone jumping out of the bushes and grabbing you."

Molina had a friend who was assaulted by someone they both knew. "We'd known this guy for four years and thought we knew him well. We didn't."

As Molina talks to a class, she scans the room, making eye contact with everyone. "When you're drugged or drunk and you change your mind, they should stop," she says. "Bad judgment is not a rape-able offense."

Statistics reveal that roughly 80 percent of rapes are acquaintance rapes. But Simon doesn't distinguish between one kind of rape and another. "It's always forced — it's about consent — sometimes you get beat up and some-

times you don't.

"What's interesting is that I'm not a rape survivor," says Simon. "I had a happy family life. I did experience the trauma of my father dying young, and I began to see the connections there. Then what drew me to it were social justice issues. You fight sexism, you fight racism, you fight homophobia — you fight them all together. You don't fight them separately."

Simon's concern for victims is fueled by her politics as well as compassion. "Child abuse supports a patriarchal, hierarchical society," she says. "If you teach children to obey, and to be afraid, and to hate themselves, they will be less likely to question authority. When you're put down as a child, that teaches you, 'If I speak up I'm going to get hurt. I'll just shut up.'"

Emily Thompson, a woman in her twenties with short dark hair, works full time for Project SURVIVE. She's a survivor of domestic violence. "A lot of students are survivors of domestic abuse or rape, and they're going through it now. There are people in Leslie's classes who are living in shelters," she says.

"Part of doing Project SURVIVE," she says, "is not to work on your own stuff, but to know what your stuff is."

While Simon's classes aren't therapy sessions, she helps her students understand where violence begins and how to heal from it. She hopes that people will leave with the knowledge and the tools to nurture their own strength and awareness, and, if they choose, to help others do the same.

# BIO CAMINO

## TURNING A GAS GUZZLER INTO A VEGETARIAN

By Boyd Williamson







stock. And in a 100-mile area. It diminishes the environmental benefits of biodiesel, Lemons says, for soybean oil to be shipped by train from the Midwest or from overseas to a large processor in Texas to a distributor in the Bay Area.

The big players are going to come, and at some point there will probably be consolidation," Lemons concedes. She's hopeful, however, there's a future for sustainable biodiesel. "This industry is so young, there's still room to do it right," she says.

Jennifer Radtke shares Lemon's vision. She is the co-founder of the BioFuel Oasis, a biodiesel pumping station in Berkeley. Even before Radtke opened the bay door to a wet and cold Saturday morning last February, a line of Volkswagens was waiting outside.

The success of the BioFuel Oasis bodes well for future of grassroots operations. In only four years, it has grown from a two-person operation to a six-woman worker's cooperative serving about 1,800 people.

"Ultimately, it's best if you make your own biodiesel," Radtke says. "What we wanted to do here is give people who don't have the time to make it themselves another good option."

In February, Radtke spoke to a City College class filled with auto mechanics. Mixing up a miniature batch of biodiesel, the flannel and blue jean-clad Radtke looked like a laid-back high school chemistry teacher.

However, after one student questioned biodiesel's advantages over oil, Radtke's demeanor became less detached. She spoke passionately about biodiesel's environmental benefits, about how government subsidies hide the real cost of oil, and she argued that a "diversified" fuel supply would have made the Iraq war less likely.

"It's a power thing," Radtke says about the feeling of independence and self-sufficiency she gets from home



City College Biodiesel Conversion Club co-founder Chris Avilla (foreground)

brewing her own fuel.

Shane of the City College biodiesel club shares the same view. The 25-year-old drum teacher and Bayview resident — who drives an '86 Ford F250 that runs on vegetable oil — said he was looking for "an alternative to having to depend on the petroleum industry."

Shane says he is concerned about the war in Iraq, global warming, and, like a lot of other biodiesel fans, high gas

prices in a time of record oil company profits. "We're bypassing all that," he says.

After this semester, Avilla and Shane plan to open a worker-owned auto shop specializing in gas-to-biodiesel engine conversions.

"The goal is to reach out

to the working class — people who can't afford to buy hybrids and who are feeling the financial pressure of living in the Bay Area," Avilla says. "If we can help bring down the price of living for them, that would be a victory in itself."

With the arrival of spring, the El Camino's new engine is beginning to rumble to life. Its body is primed and waiting for a custom black and Day-Glo green paint job. "His day has come," Avilla says.

He's staring at the El Camino, but he's referring to biodiesel.

**The idea of dropping a diesel engine into an El Camino powered by cafeteria grease at first was met with blank stares from their fellow students. But Avilla and Shane made believers out of the skeptics.**



Kirstin Williams, a dancer

# Dancing around the issues

By Cindy Ngai

**E**arlier this semester, Kirstin Williams, 35, could be seen strutting around the North City, her pronounced belly stretching the fabric of her T-shirt like an over-inflated party balloon. The ends of her blonde hair trimmed in turquoise blue added to her spunky look. With her pregnancy in full bloom, she appeared ready to breathe life into the room at any moment.

As a dancer, teacher, social activist, wife and mother of two, she has more energy than her students.

She has taught dance for 17 years, six at City College of San Francisco. Her passion and enthusiasm motivates her students to become better dancers and to face new challenges.

As she takes roll, she announces that anyone who wants to add can. "I'm taking everybody!" she says. Each semester, the fluorescent lit dance studio is filled with more than 40 students for her beginning hip-hop class. Luckily, the dance studio is big enough. Her students vary in age and ethnicity — and they seem to prefer street clothes over lycra. From break dancing to half cartwheels with a flip, to handstands on a chair, she does not hesitate to demonstrate difficult moves.

"She has endurance. I'd have to say that!" says Daniel Detrick, a City College hip-hop dancer. "First of all, you have to be in good shape 'cause not everybody could just go out there and do what she does while being pregnant."

It's not the first time Kirstin has taught dance with a baby on board. She has a two-year-old son, Malvik, whom she takes to class occasionally. Shortly after giving birth to her son, Kekoa, in March, she returned to class with her newborn baby securely strapped to her chest.

Kirstin's dedication and love for dance extends beyond teaching. She choreographs dance routines for City College performances to help raise funds for the new Wellness Center on campus. She also runs a modern dance company, Strong Current, whose funds support local women's shelters and a prison reform group called Critical Resistance. She believes that there should be "better education and money for schools instead of more prisons."

Her emotions are expressed through her body language. She uses dance as a form of communication. And she does not shy away from addressing social and political issues.

In "Delicate Choice," one of her choreographed pieces, a dancer lies on her side swinging her feet back and forth

like a pendulum to cello music – an interpretive piece that creates a painful image about the ongoing conflict surrounding women's right to choose. "We cannot take things for granted," she says. "We need be proactive or else what we have today can easily be taken away tomorrow."

In "Free Us," another dance routine, censorship in the media is the underlying theme set to hip-hop. Kirstin says she choreographed the piece to get her audience to think about how society is affected and controlled by the images we see every day.

From the beginning, when I founded Strong Current, I wanted it to be a socially conscious group. I love dance and I think it's beautiful, but I want there to be meaning as well," she says.

Her dances are crafted artistically, but with a message. "It's not just about beautiful movement," she says.

Although she came from a small town in the Central Valley – Porterville, Calif. — she has performed in dance companies and taught from coast to coast. Her older sister, Deidre, teaches grade school in Oakland and her mother runs an assistance program for women at Porterville Community College.

Kirstin has lived in New York and San Diego, cities that broadened her artistic and cultural perspective. But she's also seen the harsh realities of poverty.

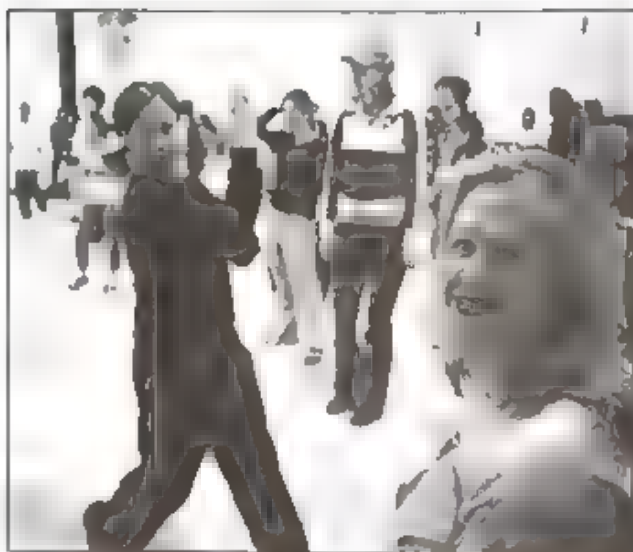
"The world is not all roses," she says. But she believes that there's hope and she's committed to working with underprivileged families. "The children of our future are my inspiration," she says.

"I think the reason why I have so many people in my class is because I really try to create a community," Kirstin says. "I try to make everyone feel equal and well respected. And I try to keep it upbeat. I want us to be supporting each other."

As soon as she turns on her microphone headset and steps onto the dance floor, she sets the tone—a mixture of excitement, fun, and unmistakable intensity. Her sometimes raspy voice constantly encourages her students to give more.

Even for her beginners, Kirstin bumps it up a notch or two, making the routines more challenging. At the end of each semester, her intermediate class performs at City College's Diego Rivera Theater.

Since most of Kirstin's students are not professional dancers, performing for a college audience allows them to



Intermediate hip-hop: Kirstin, 9-month pregnant, sits down.

participate in the world of theater and performing arts that they might not otherwise experience.

No matter what, she always has a vision of what she wants and she can carry it through," says James

Castaneda, Kirstin's assistant who has danced and choreographed with her for two years.

"I discovered what I wanted to do with my life at City College," says Kirstin. "It's a nice meeting ground where kids are just developing their ideas about where they want to go. I think it's an exciting place."

A round of applause punctuates each class session. Sweaty dancers depart from the studio exhausted and out of breath. Empty water bottles are scattered around the perimeter of the dance floor. Kirstin collects

her CDs and mingles with some students.

"Who doesn't want to be somewhere where people are cheering you on," she says. "We don't get that enough in our lives."

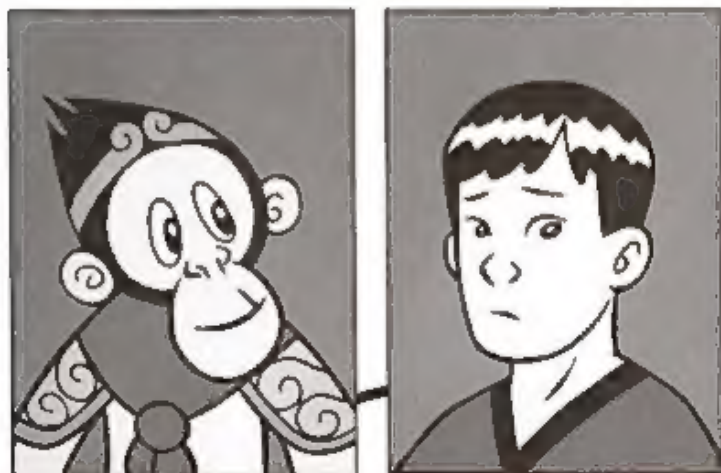
*Cindy Ngai, a Cal State Hayward graduate in American and British Literature, has taken classes for the past year in Beginning and Intermediate Hip-Hop at City College with dance instructor Kirstin Williams.*



Family portrait: Kirstin.



Gene Yang's graphic novel, 'American Born Chinese,' about what it means to be Asian American, was recently nominated for the National Book Award.



comic

## STEREOTYPES



PHOTO BY ERWIN CALUNA

By Andrew Tan

**W**ho ever heard of a comic book being nominated for the National Book Award?

Gene Yang has. His graphic novel, "American Born Chinese," about what it means to be Asian American, was nominated for the prestigious literary award last year. It was the first comic book to be nominated and Yang was just as surprised as anyone.

"I first heard from my editor," says Yang, who teaches computer science at a Bishop O'Dowd Catholic High School in Oakland. "I was absolutely blown away."

"As a comic book artist," he says, "I've dreamed about the Eisners and the Harveys, the major comic book

industry awards. I didn't really give much thought to how the book world would react. It was an unexpected honor."

It's a big deal when a comic book is nominated for a literary prize. It doesn't happen very often. Art Spiegelman's comic book, "Maus" won a Pulitzer in 1992. An issue of Neil Gaiman's comic book, "The Sandman," titled "A Midsummer Night's Dream," which focused on Shakespeare and his play, won the World Fantasy Award in short fiction in 1991.

Yang's comic has generated a lot of attention for its National Book Award nomination. "American Born Chinese," while sure to appeal to

those of Asian-American heritage, resonates with readers of any background. At its core is a common theme — the search for identity.

Yang's parents immigrated to America in the late '60s. His father came from Taiwan and his mother from mainland China. Born and raised in the Bay Area, Yang, 33, attended UC Berkeley and now lives in Fremont with his wife, Theresa, and young son, Kolbe. He majored in computer science and minored in creative writing. Because he teaches during the day, he works on his comics in his spare time.

As a youngster, Yang spoke Mandarin at home. His thoughts were in Mandarin, as well, until his

English got better in second or third grade. Growing up in the South Bay, he was one of a handful of Asian-Americans at his elementary school.

"The community I lived in was in a state of transition," he says. "More and more Asians moved into the neighborhood throughout my junior and senior high school years. Nowadays the schools are 70 to 80 percent Asian-American."

In retrospect, being an Asian-American and living in the Bay Area shaped his outlook.

"I think being a minority definitely affected me in all sorts of ways. There was always a discomfort inside of me, and I didn't really connect it to my ethnic identity until college. At Berkeley, race seemed to be on the forefront of everyone's mind. That's where I really began to think through my identity as an Asian-American," he says. "American Born Chinese" could be viewed as the culmination of Yang's understanding of his ethnic identity.

"[The comic book] is made up of three different storylines," he says. "The first is a retelling of the Chinese legend of the Monkey King. The second is a coming-of-age story about a Chinese-American boy [named Jin Wang] growing up in a predominantly white suburb. And the last story is a sitcom that stars Cousin Chin-Kee, an amalgamation of all the negative Chinese stereotypes I could think of."

The Monkey King is a deity who looks like a monkey, often wields a staff, and occasionally rides a small cloud like a flying surfboard. The character, which first appeared in the Chinese novel "Journey to the West," has inspired numerous imitations. Written by an anonymous author during the Ming Dynasty in the late 1590s, "Journey to the West" is considered one of the four great classical novels of Chinese literature. In Asia, the Monkey King is practically a genre. One of the most well-known examples of a Monkey King adaptation is probably the Japanese animated series "Dragon Ball Z," which has



"AMERICAN BORN CHINESE" artwork, ABOVE AND OPPOSITE, COURTESY OF FIRST SECOND BOOKS

The Monkey King, above, who first appeared in the novel "Journey to the West," gets a lesson in humility. Opposite page: Gene Yang, author of the graphic novel "American Born Chinese," with his characters, the Monkey King and Jin — Yang's alter ego.

also become popular in America. To come up with his own spin on the legend, Yang decided to do an Asian-American take on the story.

In one of the earliest scenes in "American Born Chinese," the Monkey King tries to enter a dinner party in heaven with other deities. However, he is denied entrance to the party because he is not wearing shoes on his monkey feet. After losing his temper and beating up the other guests, the Monkey King returns to his sanctum and broods in the dark over his monkey heritage, which he had never really thought about until he was shunned for it.

The Jin storyline, on the other hand, is less allegorical. "Many of the racial slurs thrown at Jin and his little Asian crew are direct quotations from my junior high experience," Yang says. "Racism seemed especially overt and virulent in junior high. It only

came from a very small group of kids, but it tainted my interactions with all whites. I'd wonder if all whites were thinking the same things [they] said out loud, but were just too polite to express it."

Other details, such as a point in the story when Jin gets a perm to impress a girl, are inspired by real situations. One of Yang's friends started eighth grade with a perm that "just looked plain ridiculous."

The three narratives, in their own ways, express Yang's thoughts on being Asian-American. The Monkey King expresses the desire to gain acceptance through hard work. Jin's story reflects Yang's personal experiences. The Chin-Kee storyline represents every Asian-American's struggle against the prevalent negative images in pop culture.

"American Born Chinese" effectively captures the complex thoughts





FROM "AMERICAN BORN CHINESE," ARTWORK COURTESY OF FIRST SECOND BOOKS

and feelings many Asian-Americans often struggle to articulate and lets them know that they are not alone.

"I think the veil of fiction kept me from being overly self-conscious. If I were writing straight autobiography, it would've been much more difficult. That's not to say there weren't times when I sweated a little as I was writing," he says.

Yang acknowledges that there are certain aspects about a person that can be controlled or changed, and aspects that a person has no power over. But, he notes, a person's cultural heritage is something that can't be changed, and part of growing up is coming to terms with that reality.

"My ethnicity is central to my identity," he says.

Regardless of one's background, "American Born Chinese" is a fascinating exploration of how it feels to be different. It may be a comic book, but it also fits the description of a "graphic novel" because it's a bound paperback. The story's effectiveness depends on its medium, as it presents elements that range from whimsical to serious and fantasy to real world in an

art style that creates a consistent tone throughout.

If the story were done in prose, the fantastical images and the bright colors would be gone, and much of the humor would be lost.

While film is akin to comics (most films and TV shows work from storyboards, which are essentially "silent" comics), there is a big difference between the two mediums. In film, the viewer has no control over the rate at which they receive the visual information. In comics, the reader controls the pace.

It's this principle of reader control over information that makes comics a valuable educational tool, according to Yang, who recently gave a presentation about the use of comics in the classroom.

One of the unique things about comics is the space between panels on a page. The human mind processes the unseen moments between panels and mentally fills in the blanks. Readers become more than just readers — they are participants.

For example, imagine a page with two panels. The first panel shows a

boy facing a bully. The boy taunts the bully. The second panel shows the boy, alone, lying on his back, beaten and dizzied. We don't see the bully hit the boy; we imagine it according to our experience, and in some ways this is more painful than actually seeing the bully punching the boy. Scott McCloud, in his book "Understanding Comics," says this phenomenon makes the reader "a silent accomplice" and "an equal partner in crime."

The National Book Award nomination demonstrates that readers of all ages can enjoy and learn something from "American Born Chinese" and other comics. Without talking down to the audience or belittling people of other ethnicities, Yang's story succeeds in bringing the theme of racial identity to the forefront.

The book's nomination in the category of Young People's Literature was not without controversy. Some are skeptical about categorizing comics as literature. In October, a *Wired* magazine online writer editorialized: "Comic books should not be nominated for National Book Awards, in any category. That should be reserved for books that are, well, all words."

Yang admits that prose and comics are different forms of media, but he notes that picture books have received National Book Awards, so his nomination wasn't wholly unprecedented.

Although "American Born Chinese" lost out to a young adult novel that was nominated in the same category — "The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing" by M.T. Anderson — this is just the beginning for Yang. "American Born Chinese" wasn't his first comic and it won't be his last. He has plenty of ideas for his next projects.

"I didn't deal very explicitly with my relationship with my parents," he says. "Parental relationships, and familial relationships in general, loom large for most Asian-Americans. I don't regret leaving it out. It gives me fodder for future comics."





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